

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

Digital Repository

Leopold Center Completed Grant Reports

Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture

2006

Leveraging linkages to the Conservation Security Program

Duane Sand

Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation

Tim Gieseke

The Minnesota Project

Follow this and additional works at: http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/leopold_grantreports



Part of the [Natural Resources and Conservation Commons](#), and the [Natural Resources Management and Policy Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Sand, Duane and Gieseke, Tim, "Leveraging linkages to the Conservation Security Program" (2006). *Leopold Center Completed Grant Reports*. 263.

http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/leopold_grantreports/263

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture at Iowa State University Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Leopold Center Completed Grant Reports by an authorized administrator of Iowa State University Digital Repository. For more information, please contact digirep@iastate.edu.

Leveraging linkages to the Conservation Security Program

Abstract

The joint Iowa-Minnesota project examined ways in which the newly created Conservation Security Program (CSP) could be best integrated with existing local resource management efforts.

Keywords

Policy

Disciplines

Natural Resources and Conservation | Natural Resources Management and Policy



LEOPOLD CENTER
FOR SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

Leveraging linkages to the Conservation Security Program

Abstract: The joint Iowa-Minnesota project examined ways in which the newly created Conservation Security Program (CSP) could be best integrated with existing local resource management efforts.

Question & Answer

Q: How can CSP be used to clean up water in my community?

A: CSP will have little direct and immediate impact on water clean-up unless local conservation leaders work to make the most of the program. Extra effort before and during a watershed sign-up period can increase enrollment and set the stage for more water protection throughout the CSP contract.

protection than the CSP authorized by Congress in the 2002 Farm Bill.

The good news is that Iowa has responded well to the CSP, with 290 farmers signing up in 2004 and 1,973 farmers in 2005. Iowa has more farmers enrolled than any other state and CSP has increased conservation incentive payments to these farmers by about \$16.5 million per year. The Iowa NRCS (Natural Resources Conservation Service) has successfully enrolled nearly 17 percent of the eligible producers compared with the national average of only 5 percent.

Background

The Conservation Security Program (CSP), created by the 2002 Farm Bill, is a voluntary program that provides financial and technical assistance to promote the conservation and improvement of natural resources on private working lands. Financial incentives are keyed to performance based outcomes rather than payments made for specific conservation practices.

The purpose of this project was to develop specific recommendations to help state and local leaders integrate the new Conservation Security Program into local watershed projects. The project considered the value of a rapid response team from various agencies to help local leaders assess water protection needs, look at available funding sources, set priorities and adopt a work plan for maximum CSP enrollment. However, the CSP actually implemented in 2004 and 2005 turned out to be less valuable for water

The bad news for water protection is that CSP is expected to have little budget growth in for the next several years. There is enough growth for the watersheds announced for 2006 signups and there is potential for a 2007 signup for selected watersheds in spite of caps on CSP growth from 2008 to 2012. The CSP will continue, but its future is limited without greater support in the 2007 Farm Bill.

Budget constraints have diminished the role of CSP in watershed protection in these ways:

- Only the best conservationists are enrolled, and producers having the most negative water quality impacts are excluded from the program.
- CSP incentives are a fraction of what Congress authorized, so there may be little reward for changing management practices to become eligible for CSP enrollment.

Principal Investigator:

Duane Sand
Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation
Des Moines, Iowa

Co-investigator:

Tim Gieseke
The Minnesota Project
New Ulm, MN

Budget:

\$20,000 for year one

- The rotation of watershed signups may extend beyond the eight years originally estimated, leaving producers in doubt about when or if they will have their first (or second) chance to enroll.
- Opportunities for practice payments and enhancement payments maybe greatly limited for those who are already enrolled, but are interested in adding more conservation practices.

Approach and methods

The Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation and the Minnesota Project cooperated to review existing CSP delivery capacities of government agencies and to understand their vision as to what role each agency should fulfill to implement CSP through a coordinated watershed approach. An Iowa-Minnesota retreat was held to bring concerned individuals together to exchange ideas about efficient CSP organization and implementation.

Key administrators in state agencies were interviewed between December 2004 and February 2005. The interviews consisted of six base questions that focused on their current understanding of CSP, involvement with local watershed organizations, any additional information that administrators felt should be provided to local leaders, their willingness to serve on a rapid assessment team to help local watershed leaders, what training or information they needed to help watershed organizations fully utilize CSP, and what they perceived as the key constraints to farmers signing up for CSP.

Interviewers noted that agency personnel interviewed in February 2005 were much more knowledgeable about the logistics and program details of CSP, thanks to a significant increase in the amount of CSP information available. Most of the soil conservation districts in cooperation with NRCS hosted numerous meetings within the eligible CSP watersheds to inform farmers about the requirements and processes in early 2005. In addition, there was considerable media coverage of this new farm bill program.

Conclusions

The project found that despite the budget limitations, those surveyed perceived that CSP has broad and diverse conservation benefits and these opportunities are worth pursuing independent of watershed plans. The

project process identified ten recommendations for local conservation leaders to help derive maximum benefit from CSP:

(Prior to the watershed signup announcement)

- Generate positive publicity about the benefits of CSP and encourage local conservationists to promote the program to public officials.
- Distribute the CSP self-assessment workbooks as an educational tool about the program and the conservation practices that make a farmer eligible for CSP rewards.
- Encourage early development of conservation plans that will help farmers implement the practices known to create eligibility for the CSP Tier in which the farmer hopes to enroll.
- Encourage the recordkeeping needed to document eligibility, but also use this opportunity to educate producers about the economic and environmental benefits of the practices documented.

(During the signup period)

- All interested agencies, organizations and agribusinesses can work together to organize and publicize community or neighborhood informational meetings.
- Professionals in the public and private sectors who advise farmers can be educated about CSP and be encouraged to initiate one-on-one conversations about CSP signup opportunities.
- Plan for a last minute rush near the signup deadline and find additional staff, volunteers, and equipment to maximize enrollment numbers at the local NRCS office.

(After the initial signup period)

- Contracts can be awarded to eligible acres or practices added to move to a higher Tier, but these changes need to be planned in advance rather than initiated just prior to the deadlines for contract amendments.
- CSP participants can be recruited for greater leadership roles within a watershed or within a soil and water conservation district. The "reward the best, motivate the rest" plan can be applied to a broad range of educational and social interactions within the community, and may be more critical than the CSP incentive payments in the long run.
- CSP participants can be encouraged to support and mentor each other to fully utilize the CSP incentives for local conservation leadership. Enhancement payments are available for the cost of participating in the NRCS approved on-farm research, demonstrations, pilot projects, assess-

ment and evaluation of conservation practices or systems, and implementing a watershed or regional conservation plan.

Impact of results

A planned and detailed discussion of CSP implementation experiences involving conservation leaders from two states produced this useful policy information:

1. Specific recommendations were identified for local officials wanting to optimize CSP benefits,
2. Important understanding and problem solving discussion occurred among state level administrators and leaders during the planning retreat, and
3. Problems and opportunities were identified and could be shared with national administrators and policy makers through activities of the research organizations.

The project objective of communicating how to integrate CSP in watershed programs was accomplished, but actual opportunities and public benefits were substantially less than anticipated in the initial proposal due to budget and

rule constraints for CSP that evolved during the research period. The investigators found the research methodology to be very productive for all participants because of the chance to compare and contrast policies and experiences in two states.

Education and outreach

Project findings will be shared with the general public through the newsletters and web sites of the Minnesota Project at www.mnproject.org/csp. The Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation will work with the Soil Conservation Districts of Iowa and the Division of Soil Conservation within the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship to provide findings to local conservation professionals and SWCD commissioners.

Leveraged funds

No additional funds were leveraged from this project.

For more information contact Duane Sand, Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, 505 5th Ave, Suite 444, Des Moines, Iowa, 50309; (515) 288-1846, e-mail dsand@inhf.org